Two-hundredth Anniversary

HISTORY

...OF...

St. Joseph's (Hill) Lutheran Congregation

PIKE TOWNSHIP, BERKS COUNTY, PA.

1731-1931

ST. JOSEPH'S (HILL) CHURCH

1731 1931

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According to a statement made in the Hallesche Nachrichten, volume 1, page 415, revised edition, this may easily be the oldest Lutheran Church and congregation in Berks County and one of the oldest in Pennsylvania. This is the statement, "Oley, where a beginning was made already in 1704". This evidently means that efforts were made at that time to establish a church. This will not seem impossible or even strange if we remember that some deeds in Oley are dated 1682 and that there was quite a colony there between 1700 and 1710.

Some confusion has been occasioned by the application of the same name to three churches in three different sections. We have the Hill Church in Berks County, originally known as the "Church on the Oley Hills." It was probably so called because of its location on the northern range of hills encircling the Oley Valley. It is located on top of the divide between the sources of the Manatawny and the Swamp creeks. It was also formerly known as Willow Vale or Willow Dale (Weidenthal). Some are of the opinion that the term "Weidenthal" or "Weitenthal" refers to the wide or broad valley which lies at the foot of the Oley Hills. This name puzzled the editors of the revised edition of the Hallesche Nachrichten very much. It is now known that the entire plateau from Hill Church to Lobachsville was designated thus. The Hill Church in Lebanon County is located on the southern slope of Gravel Ridge, about midway between Lebanon and Annville, approximately one-half mile north of the Harrisburg Pike. It was originally called "The Church on the Quitapahilla," although it is one-half mile or more north of that stream. The third church thus named is also very frequently called "The Sand Hill Church", to distinguish it from

the others. It is located about three miles southeast from Hummelstown, Dauphin County, on the same mountain range as our Hill Church. This mountain range is variously named in different localities, as the Sand Hills, the South Mountains, and the Lehigh Hills or Mountains. Rev. John Casper Stoever and Rev. Henry Melchior Muhlenberg in their records almost invariably designate the place as the Oley Hills.

Rev. John Casper Stoever in the earlier days of his ministry, before his ordination and before his settling at the Conestoga near New Holland, between 1731 and 1735, has recorded a score or more baptisms performed by him in this vicinity, a copy of which is in our possession. This would certainly indicate that he visited this place a number of times each year and held services here. Would he have done this without a Congregation either actually organized or in prospect? He was evidently preceded in his labors here by Rev. Anthony Jacob Henkel, who preached at Germantown, New Hanover, Manatawny, Oley Hills and Tulpehocken. Whether he found a church and an organization already at hand at this place, or whether he did as he did at Tulpehocken, urged the necessity of the step and had it carried out, we cannot say, but he appears to have been the man who cared for this section at that early day—1718. His activities came to a sudden end by a fall from his horse in the vicinity of Chestnut Hill on August 12, 1728, while travelling between Germantown and his home in New Hanover.

Daniel Falckner, who seems to have come to this country as an ordained minister and his brother Justus, who was ordained by the Swedish pastors for this purpose about 1703, both preceded Reverend Henkel. While Falckner Swamp and Molatton seem to have been organized with the beginning of the century, if not a few years before, it is not certain that these men also founded an organization on the Oley Hills at the same time.

It is impossible to say whether Rev. John Christian Schulze, pastor in Philadelphia, Germantown, New Hanover, etc., also served this congregation or not, when John Casper Stoever arrived in this country and whose assistant he seems to have been up to the time that Schulze ordained him. Appearances indicate that he did so.

The next man to officiate here was a man named John George Schmidt. What is said about a certain Mr. Schmidt who strove to organize an opposition congregation at New Hanover in Hallesche Nachrichten is so unsatisfactory that we deem it best to ignore it entirely. It is impossible to say whether this is the same man or not, but one thing seems evident, viz., whether the same man or different men, we would be putting it mildly if we applied the term impostor to one or both, as the case may be. The following promissory note will show that the man resided in this vicinity, also that he posed as a Lutheran minister:—

Bern Township, in Lancaster County, May 5, 1739.

We, the undersigned, promise to pay to John George Schmidt, minister of the Lutheran Church in the township of Colebrookdale, County of Philadelphia, the sum of eight pounds — four pounds on or before November 16, 1739, and the other four pounds the 16th of May, 1740. Witness our hands, in the township of Colebrookdale, in the county of Philadelphia, May 5, 1739.

Matthias Smith,
Conrath Scharff,
(Signed) John Kleppinger,
John Adolph Hemrich.

This established several facts, first, that this man claimed to be the resident pastor of a Lutheran Church in Colebrookdale. This was the only Lutheran congregation then existing there. It also shows that at this early day a movement in opposition to Stoever in Bern township, apparently near Bernville, had commenced. These men were prominent members of Stoever's Tulpehocken church, directly west of Bernville, for the names of these men are not only found in Rev. Stoever's private records, but are also recorded in the Little Tulpehocken Church record. The fact that in July, 1741, John George Schmidt, by order made this note payable to George Boone, Esq., would indicate that he left this vicinity about this time.

One of the great difficulties in getting at some of the facts of the case lies in the indefiniteness of the name Oley. At present it is applied to a single township. At that time it was sometimes made to embrace almost all the territory between the Manacacy and the Manatawny and their water-sheds, almost one-third of the eastern half of Berks County. The original Oley Church of the Reformed was located between three and four miles south-west from the Hill Church.

We need not dwell on the claim sometimes put forward that possibly Amityville might be the original Oley Church of the Lutherans, further than to say that all the known facts are against it. Not only is the Oley Hill Church fully 15 years older, but Rev. Stoever preached and baptized children at the Oley Hills about 20 or 25 years before the Amityville Church was founded, and Rev. Henkel did the same about 40 years before. Rev. Henry Melchoir Muhlenberg distinctly states that Amityville was organized by the Germans, whose wants could not be met at Molatton and therefore never had anything to do with the Oley Hill Church. Besides this, Amityville was never included in Oley Township and never was a part of Oley proper.

A document, generally called a Declaration, evidently drawn up with the intention of having a copy of it placed in the cornerstone of the third church erected in 1853, gives the following information, that

on August 12, 1741, the Lutherans of this vicinity, the Oley Hills, took up 50 acres of land for church and school purposes.

Afterwards, in 1747, they erected upon it an Evangelical Lutheran Church, a wooden or log building. They were aided by others, whose help they gratefully acknowledged, mentioning the German Reformed particularly. As an evidence of their grateful appreciation they permitted the Reformed to bury their dead upon their cemetery. They also allowed the Reformed to send their children to the school established by the Lutheran congregation at the same rate of tuition as members of the congregation. Still further, they granted to the Reformed the privilege of holding divine services in the church whenever it was not occupied by the owners themselves. The only restriction imposed was that the Reformed must employ a regular minister, not an impostor or tramp (Landlaeufer).

In 1750 the land was surveyed by Daniel Schultz, who remitted ten shillings of his claim. The balance was paid by Jacob Kreutz (Knetz ?). It is also stated that at this time this section (of country) was not embraced in a separate township, but that it adjoined and was regarded as a part of Colebrookdale. In the same year also a log school house was built for the use of the entire community.

A somewhat remarkable transaction was the adoption of a resolution at this time to procure two keys, the one for the elders and the other for the deacons, for the church chest or altar. The elders were: Jacob Miller, Michael Hartline, Conrad Boehm, Tobias Schall, John Gerber, Frederick Meyer, Tobias Maug and John Reitnauer. The deasons were John Gerber and George Schalter.

After 38 years had elapsed, in 1785, the congregation seeing that the building had become dilapidated and entirely too small for its own use, determined to rebuild. At this time the Lutherans sold half of their property to the Reformed. There is a tradition, whether correct or not we cannot say, that the Reformed paid the quitrents, i. e. groundrents, which were still unpaid. The Lutherans say they took this step, "Because they needed the help of the Reformed, and because they regarded it their duty as a matter of Christian love, and likewise for the better promotion of the Kingdom of Christ."

They now constituted themselves a Union Church—an Evangelical Lutheran and German Reformed congregation. In 1786 the old log church was torn down and a larger structure of stone was erected in its stead. It was now named the Hill Church. The building committee was—John Hoch, Lutheran, and Conrad Mayer, Reformed. The architect and builder was Jacob Gerber. No date of the cornerstone laying or dedication is given; nor the names of ministers present at these services recorded, if such ever took place. Both were sometimes omitted during the latter part of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century.

The old log school house was demolished in 1796 and a stone building also fitted up as a residence, was erected instead. This remained in use until 1850, when the school directors of the township built a public school house of their own. The old school house is still used as the residence of the sexton.

In 1804 an eight stop pipe organ, built by Mr. Dieffenbach, was placed in the church and was dedicated on May 6 in the same year. A centennial celebration of its dedication was held on June 11, 1904.

In 1829 the Assembly of Pennsylvania passed a special act authorizing the Secretary of the Commonwealth to issue a patent to the Lutheran and German Presbyterian Congregations *share and share alike* for this particular land. A peculiarity about this transaction is the fact that the land was taken up by the *Evangelical* neighbors in 1741, that the Lutherans erected a church upon the ground in 1747, sold an acre of land for school purposes in 1750, sold one-half of the property to the Reformed in 1785, and yet had no Deed or claim to the property themselves. The only *Deed* ever issued is the one conveying the ground to the *Lutheran and German Presbyterian* congregations *share and share alike*. See Acts of Assembly, 1829, page 8.

By 1852 this second church building after having served its purposes 66 years, became inadequate to meet the wants of the congregations, as well as dilapidated. After several congregational meetings, at which various plans were discussed, it was decided to demolish the old building and erect a new one of stone. A contract was made with Franklin S. Ebling of Muhlenberg township, for the erection of a new church 50 x 60 feet for $3950.00. The old building was torn down under the direction of the building committee. All available material was used in the new building. It required 150 days work, in which 73 members took part. This was done gratuitously and accepted as a contribution. The cornerstone was laid May 15 (Whitsunday) 1853. The new church was dedicated on April 23, 1854. A list of the articles placed in the cornerstone is herewith given: A bible, Union Hymn Book, Luther's small catechism, Heidelberg catechism, flask (small bottle) of wine, as well as a manuscript copy of the rules and regulations, governing the two congregations in their relation to each other. A brief summary must suffice:

We, the undersigned, members of the church councils, together with the pastors, hereby declare to those present, as well as to future generations, that inasmuch as our forefathers of long ago had erected a house of worship here; inasmuch as our fathers built a second church on this same spot in 1786; and inasmuch as it had again become dilapidated and was too small, therefore on this 16th day of May, 1853, being Whitsunday, in the name of the Triune God, we lay the cornerstone of the 3rd church — a Union Evangelical Lutheran and German Reformed Church — about to be erected on this same plot of ground in Pike

Township, Berks County, Pennsylvania. The said congregations have agreed upon the following articles which are to be observed for all time to come as the rules of this Church:

1. Its name is St. Joseph's Church in Pike Township.

2. Its object is to secure to the members the preaching of the gospel of Christ and the use of the Holy Sacraments, as well as to facilitate the performance of those Christian duties by which the Redeemer's Kingdom may be successfully advanced —- each Congregation being entitled to one-half the time.

3. There is to be but one key to the church, which is to be kept at an appointed place, under the direction of the Church Councils.

4. The Mennonites shall also be permitted to bury their dead upon the cemetery, to hold funerals in the church, and to preach therein on other occasions, should they so desire.

5. For the alms collections, as well as for all other revenues, there shall be but one treasury, in which the congregations shall share equally.

6. We still adhere to the old Evangelical Lutheran and German Reformed Synods, and only ministers who have been regularly called and ordained shall be permitted to preach in this church. But we do not wish to be placed under any arbitrary laws, (Zwanggesetze) of any Synods, and we shall at all times regard ourselves as free and independent of any such compulsory laws.

7. Our desire and prayer is to have the Word of God always preached in its fulness and purity in this church, and to have the Holy Sacraments administered in accordance with the Un-altered Augsburg Confession on the part of the Lutherans, and in accordance with the Heidelberg Catechism on the part of the Reformed. For with our pious and sainted fathers we confess the old and ever-unchangeable truths of the gospel, and we will have nothing to do with false doctrine and sectarianism.

8. In all other matters, due notice having been given, a majority of the votes of each congregation, separately taken, shall decide, the minority shall yield to the majority.

This document is attested to by Rev. L. C. Herman, Reformed, and Rev. Nathan Jaeger, Lutheran, pastors in charge. It is also signed by Rev. S. K. Brobst, Lutheran, and by Revs. S. Herman and William A. Good, Reformed, as well as Rev. Christian Clemmer, Mennonite, as visiting clergymen. The names of the elders, Jacob Weis, John Gilbert, George Hess, George Fronheiser, and Isaac Batz, Lutherans. And Jacob Springer, John Smith, Aaron Weller and David Moyer, Reformed. Of the deacons — John Miller, John Fronheiser, John Hess, Daniel Moyer, Lewis Swavele and Martin Fry, Lutherans; with George Spohn

and John Bucher, Reformed, are also attached. These had also constituted the building committee. The entire document, probably in the same hand-writing throughout, and containing a sketch of the former history of the congregations in outline, is apparently an official copy of the declaration placed in the corner-stone. Unfortunately, the church record gives no further information. The minutes of Synod tell us that the dedication took place on April 22, 1854, as this was Saturday, possibly the two days, the 22nd and the 23rd, were devoted to this service.

February 25, 1872, at a meeting of the congregations, it was enacted that from this time forth, on funeral occasions, the bodies of the dead should not be brought into the audience chamber, but must be left in the vestibule (Vorhof oder Gang). Cases of smallpox and other contagious diseases are entirely excluded. The attestation of this action by the names of nine Lutheran and nine Reformed would indicate that this was the action of council and consistory, which the congregations endorsed in public meeting.

During 1886 the church was entirely remodeled, painted and refurnished, including windows of stained glass. A steeple and bell were also added, which greatly enhanced the appearance of the building and proved very convenient in calling worshippers together.

On February 13, 1895, a contract, for building a new barn, 36x50 feet, was awarded to Henry Yerger, at his bid for $920.00. The timber was to be furnished by the church, from the church property, and the foundation dug.

In 1905 the exterior of the church, including the steeple, was painted by August Conrad for $100.00.

Again in 1912 the church was refrescoed, and an up-to-date steam heating plant was installed. The re-dedication was held on October 14, 1912. Also on July 27, 1912, an order was given to Edwin Krause for a new pipe organ, same to cost seventeen hundred dollars, which was installed in 1916 and dedicated on July 30th, in the same year.

On March 29, 1913, it was decided to open a new addition to the cemetery, which was consecrated in 1914. Also an iron fence was erected around the old cemetery in the same year.

After the World War the congregations erected a granite monument in memory of the young men who were in the service and also planted 200 maple trees as a Memorial Grove. The dedication took place on September 21, 1919. A few years later a pavillion was erected in the grove with a seating capacity of 500.

In 1921 electric lights were installed in the church and residence and in 1923 the residence was renovated. New memorial stained glass windows with storm glass protection were installed in the church in

1925. During the same year the walls of the church were painted on the outside, and a copper cross placed on the church steeple. In 1927 one of the sheds was removed and the other three repaired. An artesian well was drilled in 1930, and an electric deep well pump was installed in 1931. A Luther League was organized on March 15, 1931.

With the historical data available at this time it is impossible to speak with certainty of the period from 1682 to 1731. However all the indications are that Rev. Daniel Falckner, as well as his brother Justus, treated this place as a missionary point, as did Rev. Anthony Jacob Henkel, between 1718 and 1728. Rev. John Casper Stoever certainly visited this place frequently and evidently held services from 1731 to 1735. Who cared for the interests of the Lutheran church during the next few years is not definitely known.

John George Schmidt officiated as pastor from 1737 to 1741, if existing records are to be depended upon.

Dr. Henry Melchoir Muhlenberg tells us that he performed the functions as pastor for these people from the time of his first settlement at the Trappe in 1742. He always refers to it as an organized congregation. It is strange that Rev. Tobias Wagner is never named in connection with this church. He served almost everywhere else in Berks County.

Rev. Lucas Rauss, who was an assistant to Dr. Muhlenberg, commenced to serve this congregation about 1752, and remained until about 1756. He began the first record at the Hill church.

Rev. Daniel Schumacher was his successor. He has recorded twelve baptisms here in 1756, six in 1758, and seven in 1759. Besides he says that he confirmed four at Hans Dieter Beutelman's house in der Oleyer Gebirge in Weidenthal. He also had another confirmation in Oley (Ohly), in 1759. Apparently he was the pastor of this church from the early part of 1757 to the close of 1759, or a little more than two years.

Rev. J. William Kurtz is generally considered the next pastor. If so, it must have been while he was a school teacher and assistant to Dr. Henry Melchoir Muhlenberg at the Trappe and New Hanover. Possibly it was to help out Rev. John H. Schaum, whose field was very large. Rev. Kurtz served this field about 1761 and 1762.

Rev. John Helfrecht Schaum moved into Berks County in 1763, residing first in Weidenthal (in this vicinity) and afterward at Rockland, Dryville. He served Hill Church, Manatawny, and Ontelaunee.

Rev. John Ludwig Voight (Focht) was evidently the next pastor. He came to New Hanover in 1765, where he served for many years. During the earlier part of his ministry at New Hanover he also served Hill Church. He was the seventh of the men sent from Halle to Penn-

sylvania. He preached Muhlenberg's funeral sermon. Possibly he served the Hill church for ten years 1765 - 1775.

The two sons of Henry Melchoir Muhlenberg, viz., Frederick Augustus Conrad Muhlenberg and Gotthilf Heinrich Ernestus Muhlenberg, D.D., preached at the Hill Church from about 1776 to 1780. In 1776 Frederick A. C. Muhlenberg left the city of New York when the British arrived. He settled at New Hanover and became the assistant to his aged father. He preached at New Hanover, New Goshenhoppen, Hill Church and supplied in Reading, thus relieving his father. In 1779 he was elected to represent Pennsylvania in the Continental Congress and at this time he remitted the ministry. He was also elected a member of the first Congress and became its Speaker. He was re-elected several times subsequently and was also Speaker of the Third Congress.

Gotthilf Heinrich Ernestus Muhlenberg was ordained in Reading in 1770 and at once became the assistant of his father. He became the third pastor of the church at Philadelphia. During this time he frequently preached in some of our Berks County churches. The records of the Hill church show that he filled the pulpit for some time. The name of H. E. Muhlenberg attests the settlement of 1779. In his day he was the foremost botanist in America.

Then the name of (Rev.) J. M. Schmidt attests the annual settlements as Pastor, from October 1780-1782. Whence this man came we cannot say. Much that is said about him in Hallesche Nachrichten, evidently is not correct. Very evidently Hallesche Nachrichten was not aware that two men named Schmidt had officiated here, and that it is almost absolutely certain that neither of them had any connection whatever with the New York man, J. A. Schmidt. The grandson of this man, viz., J. M. Schmidt, who is Rev. J. C. Schmidt, who resided in Reading, states that his grandfather removed from Berks County to the vicinity of Charlotteville, Albemarle County, Virginia; that after his death, the widow, (a Dietrich), returned with her family and made her home near Kutztown. While the proof might perhaps not be regarded as legally conclusive, it is almost absolutely certain that this man never went to New York state to reside there and in all probability was never there at all. That he was not identified with John George Schmidt is equally certain; for if that man had gone to Virginia he would have been considerably beyond the allotted four-score years. That John George Schmidt of New York and John A. Schmidt are not identical is equally plain, as fully 70 years elapsed between the periods of their activity.

Rev. Christian Streit, who had labored at Easton for nearly 10 years as pastor of St. John's Church and later became the pastor of the Church at Charleston, South Carolina, where he introduced the English language, was taken a prisoner during the war and held until exchanged. He was now obliged to leave this field. In July, 1782, he

settled at New Hanover, where he remained until 1785. During this time he served Hill Church and Amityville. As far as is now known, he was the first native born Lutheran minister. He was very fond of music, often acting as his own organist. One of his granddaughters was the second wife of Dr. Charles Porterfield Krauth.

Rev. Daniel Lehman served the Hill Church from about 1785-1789. His peculiar characteristics were great plainness, almost bluntness, in preaching, and a strong voice, which Dr. H. M. Muhlenberg tells us he exercised very freely.

His successor seems to have been Rev. John F. Weinland, 1789-1791.

Rev. John Casper Dill, who was called a licentiate at this time, asked to be received into the Ministerium. He served the Hill church from 1791 to 1797.

For quite a number of years after this, this church was served by the pastors of New Hanover. The first pastor coming thence was the Rev. F. W. Geisenhainer, Sr., D.D., who served from 1798 to 1808.

His successor was Rev. Jacob Miller, D.D., who served from 1808 to 1821. His three sons were all preparing for the ministry, but their early death prevented them from entering it. His only daughter was married to John Endlich, Esq. She was the mother of Hon. G. A. Endlich, late president judge of the Berks County Court.

His brother, Rev. Conrad Miller, became the assistant pastor from 1818 to 1821, and pastor from 1821 to 1852.

Rev. Nathan Jaeger was his successor. He served from 1852 to 1857.

The next pastor was the Rev. Henry Wendt, from 1858 to 1861.

Rev. Edward H. M. Sell, (according to Early's Historical Sketch of the Church on the Oley Hills) served from 1861 to 1863.

Rev. Alfred D. Croll was his successor, who served from 1863 to 1867.

Hill church was supplied for about a year by Conference.

Rev. Simon R. Boyer served as pastor from 1868 to 1872.

Rev. David K. Humbert served this church 17 years from 1873 to 1890.

Rev. Henry W. Warmkessel assisted Rev. Humbert from June 30, 1889, to May 1, 1890, and served as pastor from 1891 to the time of his death, March 27, 1930.

Rev. John W. Koch was chosen his successor on September 28th, and took pastoral charge on November 1, 1930.

LUTHERAN PASTORS OF THE HILL CHURCH

Daniel Falckner	1704
Justus Falckner	
*Anthony Jacob Henkel	1718-1728
John Casper Stoever	1731-1735
John George Schmidt	1737-1742
Henry Melchoir Muhlenberg	1743-1752
Lucas Rauss	1752-1755
Daniel Schumacher	1756-1760
William Kurtz	1761-1763
John Helfrecht Schaum	1763-1764
John Ludwig Voight (Focht)	1765-1775
Frederick Augustus Conrad Muhlenberg	1776-1778
Gotthilf Heinrich Ernestus Muhlenberg	1778-1780
John M. Schmidt	1780-1782
Christian Streit	1782-1785
Daniel Lehman	1785-1789
John F. Weinland	1789-1791
John Casper Dill	1791-1797
F. W. Geisenhainer, Sr., D.D.	1798-1808
Jacob Miller, D.D.	1808-1821
Conrad Miller (Assistant)	1818-1821
Conrad Miller (Pastor)	1821-1852
Nathan Jaeger	1852-1857
Henry Wendt	1858-1861
Edward H. M. Sell	1861-1863
Alfred D. Croll	1863-1867
Simon R. Boyer	1868-1872
David K. Humbert	1873-1890
Henry W. Warmkessel (Assistant)	1889-1890
Henry W. Warmkessel (Pastor)	1891-1930
John W. Koch	1930-

NOTE—With the data available it was impossible to verify the dates and length of service of the pastors who preceded John Casper Stoever.

*Anthony Jacob Henkel is also known to some historians as Gerhard Henkel.

SOLDIERS' MONUMENT